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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Wednesday, July 31, 1935.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "Misunderstood Friends." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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A garden party of a million guests! Wouldn't the idea of putting on a party like that appal you -- or even the most experienced hostess you know? Well, imagine my surprise when I heard the other day that many of us are doing just such large-scale entertaining in our gardens all summer without realizing it. Our guests come without our invitation and are so small and shy that we don't notice them.

Personally, I've never taken a garden census, but naturalists who have calculate that the average home garden harbors nearly a million small creatures ranging from birds, toads and earthworms to beetles, ants and smaller insects. But don't let the thought of this teeming multitude spending the summer on your property bother you, because many of these uninvited guests are your friends, whether you like them or not.

You know, we human beings have often been pretty stupid about the rest of the folks in the world. We've looked on some of our most helpful friends as villains and have treated them accordingly. As a matter of fact, without the help of many of these persecuted creatures mankind would find it difficult to exist.

So today, instead of talking about the unfriendly guests who get into our gardens, I thought you might like to meet some of your helpers who probably are camping out on your property right now.

First, meet Mr. Toad. No, he's not a particularly handsome guest. In fact, to speak quite frankly of a friend, I should say that Mr. Toad lacks "personality" and "appeal" and "it" and all that sort of thing. He's not attractive, to be sure, but he's the gardener's friend just the same.

Nearly everyone who has studied the matter agrees that the balance falls in favor of the toad around the garden. A Department of Agriculture biologist who wanted to find out what toads eat investigated the contents of 502 toad stomachs. He reported that toads consume more destructive insects than useful insects. But he said no one could define the value of a toad on a dollars-and-cents basis, for, though some form of toad lives in every State, they are never numerous enough in any locality to be of special economic importance. Furthermore, unlike birds, they can't travel any distance to follow an unusual swarm of insects. Before you harm a toad, remember that its daily menu consists largely of such harmful insects as the caterpillars that feast on your cabbage and beets; the weevils that eat your roses and grapes; the May and leaf beetles

that devour your beans and potatoes; the myriapods that damage the roots of your carnations, and the sowbugs that feast on the roots of your pansies. Even though you can't make a dollars-and-cents estimate of the value of toads as insect eaters, a good many gardeners are going to some trouble to bring toads into their gardens.

So much for toads. Now just a word about snakes. Of all the creatures that the hand of man is ever against, the snake is probably the most hated and feared -- by gardeners as well as by everybody else. Maybe we acquired our prejudice against snakes in the garden from Mother Eve and her experiences in the first garden. Or maybe the various poisonous snakes have given us a hatred of the whole tribe. But biologists who have looked into the snake-matter very seriously say that many of our common snakes are largely beneficial. They don't recommend snakes as close chums, you understand. But they do say that if you leave snakes to their own devices, these non-poisonous varieties will devour large numbers of insects and mice that otherwise would do harm to garden crops. Helpful snakes include the garter snake, the kingsnake, the red-bellied and green snakes present in most parts of the country, and, in the East, the blacksnake, pine snake and checkered adder; in the West, bull snakes and gopher snakes. These snakes may bite or attempt to bite when captured, but their bite is usually no more than a scratch and is non-venomous.

Few people are fond of spiders. They belong in the class with toads and snakes -- creatures that human beings generally feel a repulsion toward. If you had to choose between getting on intimate terms with a spider or a fly, I'll venture to say that you'd choose the fly. Yet flies have done a good deal more damage to mankind than spiders have -- and they haven't any habits that are helpful to us, as spiders have. Most of our common spiders are not poisonous and are beneficial. Of course, most families have their black sheep. So the spider family has its poisonous members. But these are few and far between compared to all the hard-working spiders that spend their time catching flies and other harmful insects.

Spiders are just one example of many helpful insects that may frequent your garden, and that prefer a meal of insect meat to a vegetarian diet -- that is, they eat the pests that live on your garden crops. Among these helpers are the carabid beetles and the ladybird beetles, and the ichneumons, (pronounced ik-new-mons), which look something like wasps with a narrow abdomen and a sting-like point at the back. You may not enjoy finding a ladybird beetle perched on your shoulder when you're out enjoying your back-yard. You may dislike the sight of any insect. But you'd be surprised how much help many of them give that garden of yours.

Finally, on the list of much-maligned friends, I'd like to mention an evening visitor -- the bat. Many people have a horror of bats. Probably more unpleasant superstitions are abroad about this one creature than any other. That's largely because of the bat's odd habits. There's something eerie about a flying mammal that darts about in the darkness. I'm not urging anyone to become too friendly with bats. They aren't good housekeepers; their roosts always have a nasty odor. But Mr. Vernon Bailey who has made a long and close study of them, says that bats are almost as essential to agriculture as birds. Insects make up their entire food supply. And this includes night-flying insects, like the harmful moths and beetles, that birds on the day-shift don't get.

Toads, snakes, spiders, beetles and bats -- there's a sadly misunderstood group. The moral of the story is that you can't judge a good friend by his looks nor by rumor. Ask the man who knows them.